Effective Conversations

The foundation for good performance

Supporting materials from the workshop delivered by Jackie Clifford at the NCVO / Russell-Cooke HR Conference on Monday 27th April 2015

Contents

Five questions that every employee needs to have answered

Working with managers and employees across a range of organisations has helped to identify five key questions that all employees want and need to have the answers to. These questions for the foundation for effective performance management from the day an employee joins your team through to the day that they leave it…

1. What do you want me to do and why?	This question involves considering the job description for the post, the objectives for the individual and where these fit in with the overall organisational and team plans. In some cases this question will need to be answered on a monthly, weekly and even daily basis depending upon the nature of the work involved and the level of the employee.
2. How do you want me to do it?	This question is all about standards and required operating procedures. To what standards is the employee required to work? What are the non-negotiable elements of their role? In which areas of their work is there a degree of flexibility? What scope does the individual have to make decisions about what they do, when they do it and how they do it?
3. How will I be measured?	The key to this question is knowing what "good performance" looks like. What are the measures of success for the role? What is the person expected to deliver? How will the person know if they have done a good or exceptional job? Measurement might be about performance against Key Performance Indicators and Key Performance Targets. There are also other measures which relate to behaviours demonstrated and providing evidence of competence. The measures of success for your team and your individual team members can be described in three ways: 1. Behaviours – how the team / individual operates 2. Outputs – what the team / individual physically produces 3. Outcomes – the results that the team / individual achieves How your team and its members delivers within these three areas should relate to the organisation's vision, values, culture and strategic plans.
4. How am I doing?	In any performance management process, giving feedback is key. This question is all about letting the person know what they are doing well and areas where they need to improve. Feedback should be on-going and given as soon as possible. The 1-1 process is a vital tool to be used here, as well as "catching people doing things right" on a daily basis and offering positive reinforcement.
5. What next…?	This question can work on a micro and macro level. Individuals will want to know on a regular basis what they should stop doing, what they should start doing and what they should continue doing. On a larger scale, they will want to know where their job is likely to go in the short, medium and long term and what will be required of them in the future.

The Skill-Will Matrix

The skill-will matrix is another way to consider the performance of members of your team.

Definitions of skill and will

- **Skill** is the level of experience, training and understanding that equips someone for a specific situation or task.
- **Will** is the desire to achieve, the level of incentive and the degree of confidence someone has to deal with a specific situation or task.

	Low Skill	High Skill
High will	Guide	Delegate
Low will	Direct	Excite

Source: Max Landsberg, *The Tao of Coaching 2nd 3d* (Profile Business, 2003).

This table gives indicators of actions that managers and team leaders can take when they identify where their team member is sitting within the matrix:

Guide (low skill and high will)	**Delegate** (skill and will are both high)
Invest time early on: - Coach and train - Answer questions and explain - Create a risk-free environment to allow early mistakes and promote learning - Relax control as progress is shown	Provide freedom to do the job: - Set objectives not the method - Praise, do not ignore - Encourage coachee to take responsibility: - Involve in decision making - Take appropriate risks
Direct (both skill and will are low)	**Excite** (high skill and low will)
First build the will: - Provide clear briefing - Identify motivations - Develop a vision of future performance - Then build the skill: - Structure tasks for "quick wins" - Coach and train - Finally sustain the will: - Provide frequent feedback - Praise and nurture BUT – supervise closely with tight control and clear rules/deadlines	- Identify reasons for low will - Motivate - Monitor and provide feedback

Delivering difficult messages

When delivering difficult messages it is important to use open, clear communication in order to:

- Help foster understanding and co-operation

- Generate clarity of purpose

- Improve performance

Conversations that may be considered "difficult" are those that involve:

- Performance problems with team members or those upon whom delivery of your objectives is dependant

- Changing roles and responsibilities

- Roles within your area of responsibility being identified as vulnerable

- A whole team to be made redundant because services are ceasing

Areas to consider:

- The message

- The outcome required

- The audience

- Possible responses to the message – yours and the other party's

- Managing your own emotions

- How you respond to the emotions of the other party

- Ways to present the message

- The time and the venue

Overarching principles:

- Prepare for the conversation

- Manage your own responses to the situation

- Listen to the other person's responses

- Be aware of language –verbal and non-verbal

- Support the other person to manage their responses

- Agree on next steps

Preparing the message

Preparing the content and preparing to deliver the message

In order to **prepare the message**, the following questions will help to create a foundation for the content of the message:

- What are the key elements of the message?
  - What are the known facts?
  - What are the unknowns?
  - What are the positive, negative and neutral elements?
  - What *must* the other party know? What *should* they know? What *could* they be told depending upon their response?
- What are the non-negotiable elements of the message?
- Where are the areas for discussion?
  - To what extent can you enter into discussion at this point?
- What do you want the other party to do as a result of hearing the message?
- What ideal outcome are you looking for from this conversation?
- What outcome would you be prepared to accept?

In order to **prepare to deliver** the message, consider the following questions:

- How much time do you have available?
  - Is this enough?
  - Does the message have to be delivered now if you don't have enough time available?
- What options do you have around the place in which you will hold this conversation?
  - Is the venue private?
  - Does the venue provide for access to support if needed?
  - How is the room laid out and what is available in the room?
- What support might you or the other person need once the message has been delivered?
  - Is this support accessible?
  - Do you have the phone numbers / contact details that you might need?
- What material do you need to support your delivery e.g. Copies of letters?

Delivering the message

Consider the following points as you are delivering the message:

1. Give the key message – the headline – as soon as possible with the supporting facts. Don't 'beat about the bush' or spend lots of time setting the scene in what you might perceive as an attempt to soften the blow

   Don't spend time on superfluous questions ("how are you today?" "how is x project progressing?" – the person you are talking to will pick up that you are stalling before you get to the true purpose of the meeting

2. Once you have delivered the key message, give any explanation that might be required

3. Demonstrate that you care about the other person's response

   Acknowledge any emotion that you are observing and, if appropriate, explore the emotion

   It may be necessary to take a short break if the emotional response is very strong

4. Reinforce the other person's identity i.e. Acknowledge that what is happening does not change the core of who they are, but don't overdo it as this could detract from the key aspects of your message

5. **_Where appropriate_**, offer some positive aspects of the situation

6. Offer options for next steps

7. Use open questions to explore the other person's responses

8. Find out what they need to know at this point

9. Actively listen to their responses, deal with any questions and summarise what you are hearing

10. Discuss and agree next steps

11. Confirm the following to ensure that both parties are clear about:
    a. What has been said – reinforce the key messages
    b. What has been agreed
    c. What will happen next
    d. When it will happen

Using transactional analysis during a difficult conversation

Transactional Analysis (a theory originally derived from the work of Eric Berne) gives different definitions to the terms 'Parent', 'Adult' and 'Child'. The theory says that each person can manifest the different, so called, ego states at different times and in different situations. Each state can be displayed in negative or positive ways.

Parent (Taught concept of life)

Our ingrained voice of authority that has been derived from our past experiences of a range of authority figures in our lives. The parent is formed by external events and the influences that impacted upon us in our childhood.

Different types of parent have been identified e.g. the nurturing parent and the controlling parent.

Nurturing parent

"Are you OK? You look a bit tired. Can I get you a cup of tea?"

"I know that this spreadsheet is difficult to work with; can I help you with it?"

Controlling parent

"You really should get to bed earlier."

"You must get to grips with this spreadsheet. You've got to use it the way that I told you to."

You should… you must… you ought to… you always… you never…

Child (Felt concept of life)

The child state is formed as a result of our reactions to and feelings about external events. This state is an accumulation of data that we have gathered from our senses and emotions. When feelings such as anger or despair overcome reason, it is the child state that is in control.

Different child states include the adapted child and the natural child.

Adapted child

"I'll try harder"

"I'm so sorry. I know I should have done better"

Natural child

"Let's try something different."

"This could be real fun…"

Adult (Thought concept of life)

The adult state is based in the here-and-now. When we are in this state we are making decisions based upon received data and facts. It is the state in which we are able to keep the parent and child states under control.

Adult

"How can we work this out together?"

"I won't be able to write the report today, but will have it with you by noon tomorrow"

When interacting with others it is possible to move between the different ego states in response to the way they are communicating with us.

The most effective interactions come when the adult of each party is involved. Being able to recognise when we are not in adult mode and take action to move ourselves back to this state can have an important impact on the success of a conversation.

---

[1] Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (Penguin, 1970).

Life positions

- Life positions have an impact upon how effectively we communicate difficult messages

- Life positions describe how we are feeling about ourselves and how we feel about the other person

- The best position for effective communication is "I'm ok, you're ok"

- When you are preparing yourself to deliver a difficult message consider what you need to do to get yourself into the "I'm ok position" – this may include rehearsing the conversation with a trusted colleague (within the boundaries of confidentiality)

The "OK Corral" was described by Franklin Ernst in 1971 and demonstrates the four life positions.

To read more about the theory of transactional analysis visit:
http://www.businessballs.com/transact.htm

The Drama Triangle

Persecutor-Victim-Rescuer

The drama triangle represents roles that individuals can play within a range of situations. These roles can often manifest themselves in the workplace, especially when faced with challenging times.

Persecutor	Victim	Rescuer
"it's all your fault"	"poor me"	"let me help you"
the persecutor takes on an authoritarian stance	the victim gives their personal power and authority to the persecutor this stance can be taken by groups in organisations when the place the organisation in the persecutor role – "it's all *their* fault"	the rescuer feels ok about themselves when they perceive that they are helping others – in fact they will often be putting the victim in a place where they are helpless without their rescuer
"critical parent"	"adapted child"	"nurturing parent" moving into "controlling parent"
to move out of the drama triangle, the persecutor must stop allocating blame and focus on what actions can be taken within the constraints that exist	to move out of the drama triangle, the victim must learn to take responsibility and then to take action by considering what steps they can take to resolve or address the situation	to move out of the drama triangle, the rescuer needs to relinquish control and allow others to take responsibility and take their own actions to resolve / address a situation

Recognising these roles can be helpful – it is useful to observe your own behaviour to find out if you regularly take on a particular role and then to remove yourself from the triangle so that you can be a neutral observer and focus on the facts of the situation i.e. move into adult mode.

Further information about the drama triangle can be found at:

http://www.karpmandramatriangle.com/index.html

To read the original article about the drama triangle, visit:

http://www.karpmandramatriangle.com/pdf/DramaTriangle.pdf

Additional reading

Some useful books

Title & Author	Publisher	ISBN
Difficult Conversations Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton & Sheila Heen	Penguin	978-0140277821
Fierce Conversations Susan Scott	Piaktus	978-0749923976
Vital Conversations Alex Grimsley	Barnes Holland	978-0956312808
Crucial Conversations Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler	McGraw Hill	978-0071401944
The Mind Gym The Mind Gym	Sphere	978-0316729925
Tackling Difficult Conversations Pocketbook Peter English	Management pocketbooks	978-1906610043
I'm OK, You're OK Thomas A Harris	Arrow Books	978-0099552413
Working it Out at Work Julie Hay	Sherwood Publishing	978-1907037016
Counselling for Toads Robert de Board	Routledge	978-0415174299

Some useful websites

- www.vitalsmarts.com
- www.themindgym.com
- www.businessballs.com